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Taris, R.; Feij, J.A.; van Vianen, A.E.M.

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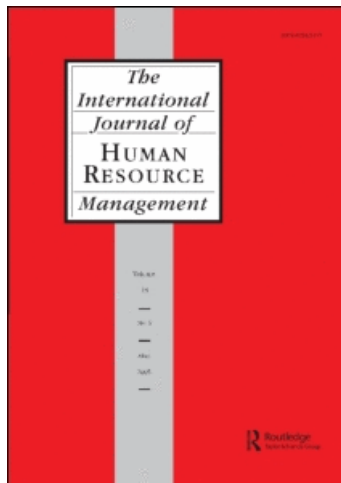
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Met expectations and supplies–values fit of Dutch young adults as determinants of work outcomes

Ruben Taris, Jan A. Feij and Annelies E.M. van Vianen

Abstract Many studies have shown that work outcomes, such as job satisfaction and turnover intentions, are affected by met expectations and the fit between the work values of an employee and the supplies offered by the organization. However, research that investigates their simultaneous effects on work outcomes is absent in the literature. This study examined the concurrent effects of met expectations and supplies–values (S–V) fit of Dutch young adults on job satisfaction and intention to leave. It was hypothesized that met expectations as an outcome of a cognitive evaluation process would explain variance in affective work outcomes beyond and above that predicted by measures of S–V fit and main effects of job supplies and work values. Results supported this hypothesis. Theoretical and practical implications of these results directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords Met expectations; supplies–values fit; job satisfaction; turnover intentions.

Introduction

A fast-growing number of studies have demonstrated that affective work outcomes, such as job satisfaction and commitment to the organization, are determined to a certain extent by the interaction or fit between an employee's personal characteristics and features of his or her job, work team or the organization as a whole (Kristof, 1996). The more an employee matches his or her job or work environment the greater the chance that he or she will be well socialized, satisfied and committed. As consequence, the probability that this employee will develop an intention to leave the organization for reasons of discontent is small.

One of the dimensions many person–organization (P–O) fit studies are focused on is work values (Chatman, 1991; Edwards, 1996; Finegan, 2000; Hesketh and Gardner, 1993; Hope Pelled and Hill, 1997; Kalliath *et al.*, 1999; Livingstone *et al.*, 1997; Locke, 1976; Meyer *et al.*, 1998; MOW, 1987; Slocombe and Bluedorn, 1999; Taris and Feij, 2001; Vandenberghe, 1999). Some authors studied the fit between profiles of individual work values and patterns of organizational values (e.g. Aycan, 1997; Chatman, 1991; Finegan, 2000; Kalliath *et al.*, 1999; Slocombe and Bluedorn, 1999; Vandenberghe, 1999). Other studies were specifically conducted from a 'needs–supplies' perspective. In that case, fit is assumed to occur when rewards or supplies provided by the organization satisfy a person's needs, values, desires or preferences. Most of the studies that followed this need–supplies

Ruben Taris (address for correspondence), Haarlemmerweg 269-C, 1051 NW Amsterdam, The Netherlands (tel: +31 20 4868232; e-mail: R.Taris@wanadoo.nl). Jan A. Feij, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Annelies E.M. Van Vianen, University of Amsterdam.

perspective focused on the fit between the work values of a person (V) and the supplies (S) provided by the job and/or organization to fulfil those values (e.g. Edwards, 1996; Livingstone *et al.*, 1997; Meyer *et al.*, 1998; Taris and Feij, 2001).

The present study attempts to further discuss the role of supplies–values (S–V) fit in determining the employee's job satisfaction and turnover intentions. With regard to the exact source of these supplies, i.e. whether the rewards come from the job, the work team or the organization, we hold a neutral point of view in this study. After all, Kristof (1996) already argued that very often it is hard to discover if job supplies are particularly related to the job or specifically related to the organization. It is likely that the individual's perception of job supplies mirrors characteristics of the organization or the managerial style, because of specific organizational policies or because of the fact that managers often have a certain flexibility in determining the reward structures for the job.

Several authors have suggested that individuals search for jobs that effectuate their work values, but relatively few have examined how work values are converted into actual job choices (Judge and Cable, 1997; Rynes, 1991). As some authors argue (e.g. Kalliath *et al.*, 1999; Mobley, 1982), finding a job that perfectly meets someone's work values will not necessarily be realized, depending on variety of external factors, such as the labour market and other socio-economic circumstances. Anyhow, there may be considerable individual differences in S–V fit, with all the aforementioned potential consequences.

Another source of variation in affective work outcomes, aside from S–V fit, is 'met expectations'. Before entering a new job, individuals form expectations about the characteristics of the job, depending on the information that is transferred during the selection procedure (Wanous, 1992). After entering the organization, they compare their initial expectations with their job experiences. The discrepancy between what people really encounter in the job and what they expected to encounter is conceptualized as the met expectations hypothesis (Porter and Steers, 1973). Numerous studies have examined the effects of (un)met expectations on work outcomes. It was found that a small discrepancy between pre-entry expectations and post-entry experiences leads to high levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, to a low level of turnover intentions (for reviews, see Irving and Meyer, 1995; Wanous *et al.*, 1992), and to a better adjustment to a new work environment (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, it has been argued that met expectations play an important role in the formulation of the psychological contract under HRM (Grant, 1999).

To summarize, both theoretical constructs, i.e. S–V fit and met expectations, have proven to be valid for predicting affective work outcomes. There are, however, virtually no studies that examined their effects simultaneously, at least in the field of I/O psychology (Lauterbach and Vielhaber 1966) compared need-supplies and expectation-supplies indices as predictors of college achievement among military cadets.). It is therefore unclear how S–V fit and met expectations are related to each other and what their unique contribution is to the prediction of affective work outcomes, such as job satisfaction and intention to quit. Is it essential for people's affective work outcomes that the job matches their needs or is it more important that the job fits their initial expectations? The present study extends previous research on met expectations and S–V fit by examining their concurrent effects on job satisfaction and intention to leave.

Met expectations

Pre-entry expectations may concern a wide variety of aspects not only related to the job but also related to the team or organization one is about to enter (e.g. colleagues and opportunities for promotion). After entering their job, people may compare their initial

expectations with their job experiences (Porter and Steers, 1973). When questionnaires are used to measure met expectations, discrepancies, between initial expectations and experiences frequently emerge. There are two reasons for such discrepancies. The first is that expectations held by newcomers are often inflated or unrealistic (Buckley *et al.*, 1998; Wanous *et al.*, 1992). Second, people often compare their actual job experiences with early job experiences in other organizations (Louis, 1980).

The met expectations hypothesis suggests that the discrepancy between what people encounter in their jobs and what they expected to encounter influences affective work outcomes, such as job satisfaction and intention to leave. One of the strategies to minimize this discrepancy is to promote more realistic pre-entry job expectations among newcomers by means of a realistic job preview (RJP). Newcomers receive orientation information, through booklets, films, or other means, which describe in factual, rather than in idealized, terms the job and the company (Wanous, 1976). Also other sources are used to influence newcomers' initial expectations, such as inside resources (e.g. rehired employees and employee referrals) or expectation-lowering procedures (ELPs) as described by Buckley *et al.* (1998). There is considerable evidence that RJP and ELPs are effective in increasing satisfaction and commitment and in decreasing turnover (Buckley *et al.*, 1998; Premack and Wanous, 1985), although some other findings suggest that these effects can be achieved through mechanisms other than reduced expectations (e.g. coping strategies, employer concern: Hom *et al.*, 1999; Irving and Meyer, 1995).

Studies that examined the effects of met expectations on work outcomes often used direct measures of met expectations. That is, employees are directly asked to indicate to what extent the characteristics of their job meet their initial expectations. An example of this approach is the Mismatches Scale used in the International Work Socialization of Youth Study (Feij *et al.*, 1995; WOSY International Research Group, 1989). Another strategy is to measure pre-entry expectations and post-entry work experiences separately, and to calculate the difference between these measures. (It should be noted that a similar distinction can be made when operationalizing P–O fit; we shall return to this point later on). Irving and Meyer (1995) examined whether direct measures of met expectations accounted for variance in affective work outcomes beyond that accounted for by indirect measures (i.e. initial expectations and job experiences are measured independently). Their results showed that direct measures of met expectations accounted for a small, but significant, amount of variance in job satisfaction and turnover intentions after controlling for separately measured pre-entry expectations and post-entry work experiences.

In the present study, a direct operationalization of met expectations was used. The reason for this decision was that our data were collected on two successive occasions with an interval of four years. Between these two occasions people could have changed their jobs several times. It therefore didn't make any sense to measure initial expectations at the first occasion. Moreover, it was not feasible to measure initial expectations at the start of each of their jobs. Consequently, met expectations could be measured in a direct way only on the second occasion. Our design, however, allowed us to examine whether met expectations contributed to the variance in affective outcomes after controlling for post-entry work experiences regarding the supplies that were provided by the job and/or organization. In accordance with previous studies, we expected to find positive relationships between met expectations and affective work outcomes after controlling for the main effects of job supplies. Thus, when expectations are highly met, we expect that job satisfaction will be high and turnover intentions will be low (hypothesis 1).

Supplies–values (S–V) fit

Studies on P–O fit used different conceptualizations and operationalizations of the fit measure (Kristof, 1996). Some of these studies investigated the match between people's work values and job supplies. Values are conceived of as fundamental and relatively enduring characteristics (Rokeach, 1973). They represent conscious desires held by the person and encompass preferences, interests, motives and goals (Edwards, 1996). In the present study, three categories of work values that often appear in S–V fit research were measured: values concerning intrinsically rewarding work aspects, extrinsically rewarding aspects and social relations at work (Ginzberg *et al.*, 1951; MOW, 1987; Taris and Feij, 2001; WOSY International Research Group, 1989). Intrinsic work values refer to the importance individuals attach to work aspects that give them the opportunity for self-expression in their work, for example autonomy, variety and responsibility. Extrinsic work values refer to more material aspects of work such as pay, employee benefits (e.g. pension) and promotion. Social relations at work signify the quality of the relationships employees have with their co-workers, subordinates and supervisors. According to Locke (1976), work values do not directly affect work outcomes, but rather modify the way that supplies offered by an organization or job are perceived by a person. Work values are therefore treated as moderators, and as such influence the relationship between job supplies and individual affective work outcomes (e.g. Meyer *et al.*, 1998; Taris and Feij, 2001).

S–V fit can be measured in a direct as well as an indirect way. A direct method of measuring S–V fit is asking people to indicate what extent they feel that the characteristics of their job fit with their own work values. Alternatively, S–V fit can be determined in an indirect way by measuring work values and job supplies separately and consequently collapsing them into one measure. The use of direct measures to assess S–V fit has been criticized, because it does not allow one to determine whether an outcome measure is related to the discrepancy between people's work and their job supplies or to one of these components (Edwards, 1991, 1994; Edwards and Cooper, 1990).

Recent S–V fit studies (see, for example, Edwards, 1996; Hesketh and Gardner, 1993; Livingstone *et al.*, 1997; Meyer *et al.*, 1998; Taris and Feij, 2001), therefore, used the moderated regression technique as proposed by Edwards (1991, 1994). Main effects of person and organization characteristics, as well as their interactions on work outcomes are estimated with this technique. These studies indeed found interaction effects of job supplies and work values on affective work outcomes in addition to the separate effects of job supplies and work values. It should be noted that in most S–V fit studies a large amount of the variance in affective work outcomes was explained by the supplies provided by the job and/or organization, whereas the variances explained by work values and S–V interactions were small. An important limitation of many of these S–V fit studies was, however, that S and V were measured simultaneously. This may have caused method variance and could have confounded the results. In this study, we measured S and V separately.

Most theorists assume that value priorities are relatively enduring (e.g. Levy and Guttman, 1985; Rokeach, 1973). Van Vianen and Prins (1997) indeed showed that people's values and preferences remain relatively stable over time. This allowed us to use a longitudinal design in which individuals' work values were measured on one occasion and their work experiences four years later.

On the basis of the studies mentioned above we expected to find positive relationships between S–V fit and affective work outcomes after controlling for the main effects of work values and job supplies on affective work outcomes. Thus, when S–V fit is high, we expect that job satisfaction will be high and turnover intentions will be low (hypothesis 2).

The combined effects of S–V fit and met expectations

As appears from the aforementioned studies, S–V fit and met expectations are both found to be related to affective work outcomes. There is however, no research that has examined their combined effects. In the introduction we already argued that it is unclear which factor is of vital importance for affective work outcomes, (mis)fit or (un)met expectations. Does an organization need to satisfy initial work values or expectations? Moreover, what is the relationship between both concepts?

People develop expectations about the job they are applying for. Before deciding whether or not to take the job, they will go through a cognitive process in which they compare their expectations about the job with their own preferences and values. Although people may strive for an optimal fit with their future job, it is unlikely that they really expect to find such an optimal fit. First, they have to rely on sparse information about their future job and they therefore take the likelihood of having unrealistic expectations into account. Second, some people may have few alternative job choices, due to practical circumstances, such as labour market opportunities, family composition, (un)employment and income of the partner, child care and so on, and they are therefore more willing to accept a certain mismatch (Kalliath *et al.*, 1999). Phrased differently, many applicants will probably not expect that the job they are going to enter will perfectly match their work values. As a consequence, they are careful about creating too high expectations of fit with the job. Based on these considerations, they then decide whether they will be able to adapt to or cope with those job aspects that do not fit with their work values. Following this line of reasoning, it will be more important for individuals' affective outcomes that the job meets their expectations than that the job meets their initial work values.

Previous studies have shown that people's expectations at least need to match their values to a *sufficient* degree in order to accept the job (Wanous, 1992). Most people will therefore enter an organization with expectations of sufficient fit. This line of reasoning implies that the expectations about the organization can be conceived of as *expectations of fit or misfit with the organization*. Most people that enter a new organization expect that some of their initial work values will be fulfilled, but probably not all. When they are asked whether their experiences with the organization are worse or better than expected they may implicitly evaluate their expectations of fit and misfit. In that case, 'worse than expected' actually means a low fit, 'as expected' implies a sufficient fit, while 'better than expected' indicates a high fit. Thus, we argue that measures of met expectations actually are direct measures of fit, involving deeper levels of cognitive processing (experiences are compared with initial expectations including expected and acceptable levels of fit), and are therefore more realistic measures than indirect measures, such as S–V fit measures. Consequently, we hypothesize that measures of met expectations explain additional variance in affective work outcomes beyond that predicted by measures of S–V fit and main effects of job supplies and work values (hypothesis 3). It should be noted that, to allow for an adequate testing of this hypothesis, our operationalization of met expectations refers to the same dimensions of intrinsic and extrinsic work aspects and social relations at work as the S–V fit measures in this study.

Method

Sample

The present study was part of a large three-wave panel study in the Netherlands, called 'The process of social integration of young adults' (the SI-project: Dijkstra, 1989, 1993). Data were collected in a longitudinal design on three successive occasions with intervals of

four years. Participants were Dutch young adults, male and female, who were 18, 22 and 26 years of age at the start of the SI-project. The sampling procedure consisted of two steps. First twenty municipalities in the Netherlands, stratified to four regions and five levels of urbanization, were drawn. Next, 2800 home addresses of persons in the aforementioned age groups were randomly selected from the registry offices in these municipalities. These persons received a letter in which their participation was requested; 1775 young adults responded positively. They completed a self-report questionnaire and were interviewed by trained interviewers, using a structured interview schedule. The sample was practically representative of the Dutch population in the age groups mentioned above; the sample consisted of a wide range of occupations and job levels. On the second and third occasions, respectively 1,257 (T2) and 969 (T3) of the initial participants cooperated again. With respect to sex, age and socio-economic status, no sample attrition effects were found (for more details about the attrition effects of the SI-panel, see Taris *et al.*, 1993). For the present study, almost all data were collected in the last wave (T3) of the SI-project since most of the participants had finished their full-time education at that time. Only data for the work values variable were collected during the second wave of the SI-project (T2) and were, therefore, previously used in the Taris and Feij (2001) study.

From the 969 participants who participated on these two occasions, only those were selected who were employed for more than nineteen hours a week (i.e. more than half-time) on the third occasion. Through list-wise deletion of missing values, the final sample consisted of 473 subjects. The mean tenure at T3 was 72.90 months (S.D. 52.85 months), participants were on average 30 years old (SD 4 years): 40 per cent were women.

Measures

Work values, job supplies and met expectations were all measured by means of a self-report questionnaire. All measures referred to the same three categories of work aspects, i.e. extrinsic work aspects (six items), intrinsic work aspects (six items) and social work relations (three items). This categorization is rooted in several studies (Ginzberg *et al.*, 1951; MOW, 1987, WOSY International Research Group, 1989). Extrinsic work aspects are instrumental aspects of work, e.g. 'salary', 'opportunity for promotion' and 'job security'. By intrinsic work aspects intrinsically rewarding characteristics of work, such as 'autonomy', 'task variety' and 'responsibility' are meant. Social work relation items focus on the interpersonal aspects of a job, specifically relationships with co-workers and the supervisor.

Work values were measured by asking participants how they rated, in general, the importance of having a job with each of the six extrinsic, the six intrinsic and the three social work aspects (range: 1 = very unimportant, 5 = very important). Responses were added to obtain three respective work value scale scores.

For measuring *job supplies* participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale, ranging from (1) very little to (5) very much, to what extent each of the aforementioned aspects were provided by their present job. In this way, three job supplies scales were formed.

Met expectations were measured by the WOSY Mismatches Scale (WOSY International Research Group, 1989). With regard to the aforementioned work aspects, participants were asked to compare their present job with the expectations they had before they began working in this job. Responses to these items were made on 5-point scales (ranging from 1 = much worse than expected, to 5 = much better than expected), and clustered into three met expectations subscales: intrinsic and extrinsic work aspects and social work relations.

Affective work outcomes were operationalized with two scales: job satisfaction and intention to leave.

Job satisfaction was measured with one item ('How satisfied are you, all in all, with your current job?') using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (= very dissatisfied) to 5 (= very satisfied). Wanous *et al.* (1997) found support for the appropriateness of a single-item measure of overall job satisfaction, which correlated highly (0.67) with scale measures.

Intention to leave was measured with three items: 'Are you trying to leave the company as soon as possible?'; 'Do you feel comfortable in this company?' (coding reversed); and 'Do you have the feeling that even the slightest change for the worse in your work situation would make you quit?', and rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (= definitely not) to 5 (= definitely yes). The first two items were adapted and translated into Dutch from the 'propensity to leave' scale (Mowday *et al.*, 1979). The third item was self-constructed.

In the present study, all measures of job supplies, met expectations and affective work outcomes were based on data from the third occasion of the SI-project. The measures of work values were based on data collected four years earlier, on the second occasion of the SI-project, because they were not assessed at the third (last) occasion. The internal consistencies of all scales (expressed in Cronbach's α) are presented in Table 1.

Analyses

First, zero-order correlations between the variables were calculated. Second, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the relative contribution of work values, job supplies and met expectations in explaining the variance in each of the three outcome measures. To test the first hypothesis, predictor variables were entered into the regression analyses in two steps for each category of work aspects separately. Job supplies were entered in the first step and met expectations in the second step. To test the second and third hypotheses another series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted. In these analyses, predictor variables were entered into the regression analyses in three steps, again for each category of work aspects separately. In step 1, work values and job supplies were entered into the regression equation. In step 2, their quadratic terms and their interaction term were entered. Finally, measures of met expectations were entered into the regression equation. To reduce the effects of multicollinearity between variables, measures of work values and job supplies were centred by subtracting the mean from the raw scores prior to the analyses (see Edwards, 1994).

Results

The means, standard deviations, internal consistencies, and intercorrelations for all variables are reported in Table 1.

The means of all work value measures were above the mid-point of the 5-point rating scale. This indicates that extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards and social relations at work were valued as relatively important. The means of all job supplies measures were also above the neutral point of the response scale, expressing that the participants rated the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards as well as social relations provided by the organization as more than sufficient, on average. The means of all met expectations measures were above the midpoint of the scale (i.e. 3), varying from 0.25 to 0.61, indicating that supplies offered by the job and/or organization with regard to extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, and social relations at work were, on average, better than expected. Within the same taxonomic domain, variances in job supplies were larger than variances in work values, but did not differ much from variances in met expectations.

Furthermore, it appears from Table 1 that the zero-order correlations between work values and job supplies were moderate for all work aspects. Met expectations seem to be

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, reliability estimates, and intercorrelations of the study variables

| Variables | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| <i>Work values (V)</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 Extrinsic work aspects | 4.00 | .47 | (.64) | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 Intrinsic work aspects | 4.11 | .45 | .47** | (.60) | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 Social work relations | 4.40 | .50 | .49** | .33** | (.65) | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Job supplies (S)</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 Extrinsic work aspects | 3.38 | .57 | .17** | .16** | .13** | (.63) | | | | | | | |
| 5 Intrinsic work aspects | 3.93 | .56 | .07 | .20** | .06 | .48** | (.76) | | | | | | |
| 6 Social work relations | 3.99 | .72 | .16** | .07 | .19** | .43** | .35** | (.73) | | | | | |
| <i>Met expectations</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 Extrinsic work aspects | 3.25 | .51 | .19** | .06 | .13** | .46** | .22** | .34** | (.57) | | | | |
| 8 Intrinsic work aspects | 3.57 | .59 | .08 | .11* | .09 | .35** | .50** | .32** | .50** | (.78) | | | |
| 9 Social work relations | 3.61 | .64 | .20** | .07 | .18** | .29** | .28** | .57** | .52** | .56** | (.56) | | |
| <i>Work outcome</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 Job satisfaction | 4.15 | .95 | -.01 | -.01 | .06 | .31** | .36** | .42** | .27** | .30** | .35** | | |
| 11 Intention to leave | 1.83 | .85 | -.06 | .04 | -.12** | -.41** | -.38** | -.55** | -.33** | -.34** | -.46** | -.55** | (.80) |

Notes

Values in parentheses are reliability estimates (coefficient alpha). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

fairly strongly related to the experienced job supplies; correlations with work values were smaller, though significant. Finally, Table 1 shows that the outcome measures were primarily related to supplies, median $r = .36$ ($p < .01$). The outcome measures were to a lesser degree related to met expectations, median $r = .30$ ($p < .01$), but unrelated to work values, median $r = .04$ ($p = \text{n.s.}$). With regard to the different domains concerned, there was a tendency for social relations at work to have a stronger impact on the outcome measures (median r for work values, job supplies and met expectations = .20) than extrinsic and intrinsic work aspects (median r 's are .12 and .11, respectively).

Hypotheses testing

It was hypothesized that met expectations would account for incremental variance in job satisfaction and intention to leave after being controlled for the main effects of job supplies (hypothesis 1). As shown in Table 2, all met expectations measures accounted for a small, though significant proportion of the variance in job satisfaction and intention to leave, beyond that explained by job supplies. These results confirm our hypothesis. Furthermore, it is noticeable that the regression equations with social relations at work as predictors revealed the most substantial percentage of variance explained in job satisfaction and intention to leave, as compared to those with intrinsic and extrinsic work aspects as predictors.

To determine whether S–V fit measures accounted for incremental variance in affective work outcomes after controlling for the main effects of work values and job supplies (hypothesis 2) another series of hierarchical regression analyses was performed. The results of these analyses are reported in Table 3.

Surprisingly, results show that none of the product terms (S*V) predicted variance in affective work outcomes beyond that accounted for by the main effects of job supplies (see step 2 in Table 3). Hence, hypothesis 2 could not be confirmed. S–V fit did not account for additional variance in outcomes beyond and above the variance explained by work values and job supplies. The latter were the only significant predictors of job satisfaction and intention to leave (see the regression coefficients in Table 3).

Table 2 Hierarchical regression analyses: predicting job satisfaction and intention to leave from met expectations (ME) with controlling for job supplies (S)^a

| | <i>First step</i> | | <i>Second step</i> | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------|-----------------------|--------------|
| | <i>S</i> | <i>R</i> ² | <i>S</i> | <i>ME</i> | <i>R</i> ² | ΔR^2 |
| <i>Extrinsic work aspects</i> | | | | | | |
| Job satisfaction | 0.526** | 0.102** | 0.407** | 0.283** | 0.122** | 0.020** |
| Intention to leave | –0.606** | 0.166** | –0.473** | –0.316** | 0.195** | 0.029** |
| <i>Intrinsic work aspects</i> | | | | | | |
| Job satisfaction | 0.613** | 0.134** | 0.476** | 0.262** | 0.154** | 0.020** |
| Intention to leave | –0.576** | 0.144** | –0.426** | –0.286** | 0.173** | 0.029** |
| <i>Social work relations</i> | | | | | | |
| Job satisfaction | 0.573** | 0.195** | 0.463** | 0.220** | 0.209** | 0.014** |
| Intention to leave | –0.650** | 0.303** | –0.502** | –0.293** | 0.335** | 0.032** |

Notes

^aN ranged from 435 to 445.

For all columns except those labelled R^2 and ΔR^2 , table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients.

Job supplies were entered at step 1 and met expectations were entered at step 2.

* $p < .05$ and ** $p < .01$.

Table 3 Hierarchical regression analyses: predicting job satisfaction and intention to leave from work values (V), and job supplies (S), and met expectation (ME)^a

| Variables | First step S | V | R ² | Second step S ² | S*V | V ² | R ² | ΔR^2 | Third step ME | R ² | ΔR^2 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|--------|----------------|-------------------------------|--------|----------------|----------------|--------------|------------------|----------------|--------------|
| <i>Extrinsic work aspects</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Job satisfaction | 0.539** | -0.102 | 0.105** | -0.083 | -0.070 | 0.045 | 0.107** | 0.002 | 0.310** | 0.130** | 0.023** |
| Intention to leave | -0.607** | 0.008 | 0.166** | 0.173* | 0.089 | -0.125 | 0.178** | 0.012 | -0.335** | 0.210** | 0.032** |
| <i>Intrinsic work aspects</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Job satisfaction | 0.642** | -0.183 | 0.141** | -0.135 | -0.055 | 0.125 | 0.148** | 0.007 | 0.265** | 0.169** | 0.021** |
| Intention to leave | -0.611** | 0.215* | 0.157** | 0.037 | 0.032 | -0.009 | 0.158** | 0.001 | -0.292** | 0.188** | 0.030** |
| <i>Social work relations</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Job satisfaction | 0.576** | -0.021 | 0.195** | -0.133* | -0.081 | 0.114 | 0.207** | 0.012 | 0.218** | 0.222** | 0.015** |
| Intention to leave | -0.645** | -0.043 | 0.304** | 0.145** | 0.042 | -0.049 | 0.319** | 0.015* | -0.287** | 0.349** | 0.030** |

Notes^aN ranged from 435 to 444.For all columns except those labelled R² and ΔR^2 , table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients for equations with all predictors entered simultaneously.

*p < .05 and **p < .01.

To test our third hypothesis, we entered met expectations as a third step in the regression analyses (see Table 3). As expected, met expectations measures explained additional variance in job satisfaction and intention to leave. The results support our hypothesis that met expectations explain additional variance in affective work outcomes.

Discussion

Past research has demonstrated that the extent to which a job meets an employee's expectations (i.e. met expectations) and the extent to which supplies provided by an organization or job match an employee's work values (i.e. S–V fit) are important determinants of variation in affective work outcomes, such as job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. Studies that examine the concurrent effects of met expectations and S–V fit on these affective work outcomes are, however, absent in the literature. The main purpose of the present study was to investigate the unique contributions of met expectations, S–V fit, job supplies and work values in predicting job satisfaction and intention to leave.

Before discussing the results of this study in detail, three general observations should be made. First, it appeared that a substantial amount of variance in job satisfaction and propensity to leave the company was explained by the different predictor variables. A second general conclusion, which can be drawn from this study, is that job supplies is the most powerful predictor variable. Although most of the values, supplies and met-expectations dimensions were found to have a unique impact on affective work outcomes, the size of these effects differed. Our results revealed that job supplies explained a relatively large part of the variances in job satisfaction and intention to leave. Actual job experiences are the most important determinant of work outcomes. This finding corresponds with results reported in other studies (see, for example, Edwards, 1996; Irving and Meyer, 1995; Livingstone *et al.*, 1997; Taris and Feij, 2001) that have examined effects of S–V fit on work outcomes.

Third, with regard to the three value domains (extrinsic, intrinsic and social work aspects), our findings reveal that social relations at work especially predicted affective work outcomes to a large extent. These results imply the getting along well with the supervisor, colleagues and/or subordinates has a greater impact on job satisfaction and intention to leave than, for example, extrinsic motivating work aspects, such as earning a good salary. This is striking, because, during the selection procedure, most applicants will be informed about the material aspects of the jobs they are applying for, such as pay and promotion, rather than getting a reliable impression of their new colleagues.

Our first hypothesis, which proposed that met expectations would predict affective work outcomes after controlling for the main effects of job supplies, was supported. The results revealed that met expectations significantly contributed to variances in job satisfaction and intention to leave beyond and above that accounted for by job supplies.

Contrary to what was stated in our second hypothesis, the fit between work values and the experienced job supplies did not significantly contribute to the variance in work outcomes. An explanation for this somewhat surprising result might be the unequal amount of variances in work values and work experiences. Some authors (Schneider, 2001; Tinsley, 2000) argue that, when a predictor is restricted in range, the amount of variance explained in the outcome measure and the chance of finding a significant interaction effect will also be restricted. In the present study, the amount of variance in work values was rather small. Another explanation for not finding S–V fit effects might be the time gap of four years between the measurement of work values and supplies. Most previous S–V fit studies measured values and supplies cross-sectionally. Although

we have argued that values are relatively stable over time, it might be that the relatively young participants in this study, who were at the start of their career, had changed their work values due to their first work experiences.

Our third hypothesis. Predicting that met expectations would explain additional variance in affective work outcomes beyond that predicted by measures of S–V fit, job supplies and work values, was confirmed for job satisfaction and intention to leave. Finding a job that is even better than expected beforehand clearly has a strong effect on the employee's job satisfaction and the desire to stay in the organization for a longer time period. This effect seems to be present even if the effects of the benefits from the job and the S–V fit are taken into account. In a quite different sample (military cadets) and using a quite different fit-methodology (profile similarity measures), Lauterbach and Vielhaber (1966) studied the factors that could predict freshmen's adaptation to, and success in, a college environment. Their results suggest that it may not so much be the congruence between a person's needs and environmental supplies that influences the adaptation to the environment. In Lauterbach and Vielhaber's study, however, the expectations–supplies congruence measures were not controlled for the needs–supplies similarity, as was done in our study. This brings us to the question how the *extra* effect of met expectations that we have found, can be explained.

First, it might be possible, as previous research suggests, that met expectations are more 'proxy' measures of job satisfaction and intention to leave than job supplies and work values. Second, the predictive power of met expectations may reflect employees' surprise reactions. As Louis (1980) has proposed, an important feature of organizational entry experience is surprise, which represents a difference between an individual's anticipation and subsequent experiences in the new setting. Louis distinguished several forms of surprise. It occurs, for example, when conscious expectations about *the job* are not fulfilled in the newcomer's early job experiences, i.e. unmet expectations. A second form of surprise that may occur arises when expectations (both conscious and unconscious) about *oneself* are unmet. Still another form of surprise arises when unconscious job expectations are unmet or when features of the job are unanticipated. And, finally, it should be noted that not only unpleasant, but also pleasant surprises require adaptation, i.e. *overmet* expectations. It may well be possible that one or more of these forms of surprise reactions accounts for the extra effect of met expectations found in this study. Thus, it seems likely that some of the employee's pre-existing preferences or expectations regarding certain work aspects were not unrealistic, but were simply considered as unimportant before entry in the organization. Only after entry may employees have detected that the presence or absence of some job features is appreciated or desirable. After all, it is difficult to forecast what the affective reactions to particular work aspects will be. 'How new experiences will feel, as opposed to how the individual expected them to feel, is difficult to anticipate and often surprising' (Louis, 1980: p. 238). Thus, it still can be argued that retrospective explanations, as might be the case when met expectations are measured, are produced to bridge the gap between pre-entry expectations and actual work experiences. Louis has called this process of producing retrospective explanations 'sense-making'.

A third explanation of the fact that met expectations explain variation beyond that explained by actual job experiences might be that met expectations as measured in this study encompass more than just the fit between initial expectations and post-entry work experiences. Although we have no direct evidence, it is likely that met expectations reflect the outcome of a learning process in which people acquire information about their self-concepts (i.e. their self-perceived abilities, personality characteristics in relation to their goals, values and desires). Holland (1973) offers, with his congruence theory, an argument for this explanation. He argues that people select a job which they think will

match their self-concept and from which they expect that further development of their self-concept will be possible. This argument has been supported by a substantial amount of empirical research (Spokane, 1985). Therefore, it is likely that participants take these self-concepts into account when they consider their met expectations. Consequently, people's self-concept or, to be more specific, their personality probably moderates the effect of the (mis) match between their expectations and their job experiences on affective work outcomes.

Theoretical and practical contributions

This study is the first to have examined the joint effects of met expectations and S–V fit with regard to identical work value domains on affective work outcomes. As a consequence of the fact that S–V fit and met expectations referred to the same categories of work aspects, conclusions could be drawn with regard to the relative effect of these constructs on work outcomes. Moreover, we were able to compare the relative impact of extrinsically motivating work aspects, intrinsically motivating work aspects and social relation at work on job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Because the sample in the present study is nearly representative for the young Dutch working population, firm, conclusions can be drawn with regard to this specific group in general.

The results of the present study show that met expectations have a strong effect on job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Although not conclusive, results furthermore suggest that met expectations when directly measured comprise more than just the fit between initial expectations and actual supplies offered by the organization. Findings lend support to the idea that met expectations measures are the outcome of a cognitive evaluation process in which employees learn more about their job as well as their self-concepts (see also Deci and Ryan, 1985).

While this study makes several contributions to research literature, it also has substantive implications for practice. Although research has extensively examined which factors are the major focuses of job search decisions, little emphasis has been placed on the variables that affect the attrition of employees. Factors that are important to attract personnel, such as high pay levels, flexible benefits, individual-based pay and fixed pay policies (Cable and Judge, 1994), are also assumed to be important to keep personnel satisfied and to lower their turnover intentions. However, although offering extrinsically motivating job rewards, such as a high salary, is important to keep employees satisfied and to lower their turnover intentions, the present study shows that pleasant social relations at work have even stronger effects on these work outcomes.

Furthermore, the results of the present study underline the importance of individual development programme. Aside from increasing efforts to provide early realistic orientation for new employees, it is important that employees learn more about their self-concept and about the kind of rewards provided by the organization that matches best with their self-concepts. This in order to prevent employees, particularly at the beginning of their working careers, being confronted with unpleasant surprises. Also, personality assessment might be important to this aim. For example, employees who are not very open to new experiences may become dissatisfied with their work when organizations offer them too much job variety or job rotation opportunities (Van den Berg and Feij, 2003).

Limitations and future research directions

When discussing the results of the present study, it is necessary to consider the limitations of its design. These limitations may provide guidance for future research. One limitation concerns the restriction of range of the work values that were measured in our

study. When a predictor is restricted in range, the amount of variance explained in the outcome measure will also be restricted (see Schneider, 2001; Tinsley, 2000). It might be that mainly valued work aspects were used in our work values measure. This could explain the small predictive power of values in this study. Future research should therefore focus on a broader range of work values that differentiate between individuals.

More in general we may question the stability of work values. How do they develop from the beginning of someone's working career, and how are they shaped by early working experiences? How do surprising work experiences, i.e. unmet and overmet expectations affect someone's work values? Clearly, more research is needed to answer these questions. Furthermore, the present results suggest that values and also S–V fit may change, especially in the early stage of someone's working career. Although some authors (e.g. Smith, 1994; Van Vianen, 2000; Vandenberghe, 1999) argue that fit measures are very suitable in the field personnel selection, our results suggest that these measures should be used with care for career starters.

It should be clear that during the process of adaptation to a new work environment many cognitive, affective and motivational factors may be involved. Met expectations and S–V fit can both be viewed as the result of more or less conscious evaluation processes. These include representation of the work environment and self-evaluation, comparison of the actual situation with internal standards (work values, needs and expectations) and with external standards (e.g. job requirements), signalling of discrepancies and attribution of meaning to (surprising) experiences, which may all have emotional and motivational consequences. Future research should, therefore, attempt to identify the cognitive processes that differentiate between met expectations and S–V fit. In addition, the role of individual differences in personality could be taken into account. Several studies have demonstrated that personality traits are related to vocational preferences, needs and values (e.g. De Fruyt and Mervielde, 1999; Piedmont *et al.*, 1992). Traits may be important factors in the evaluation processes just mentioned. Future research should address this issue and examine the interactions of personality characteristics with met expectations and S–V fit.

Notes

- 1 It was hypothesized that the signs of the correlations between intention to leave and the various predictor variables would be opposite to those of job satisfaction with these variables. Therefore, the signs of the correlations between intention to leave and the predictor variables were inverted before computing the median *r* values.

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